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**RUSSIA**

## SUCCESS STORY

# Justice with a Smile: New Rules of Conduct

**USAID is helping Russian court personnel build public confidence in their courts through a new code of conduct for court employees.**



photo: RJRP/ROMAN RODIONOV, 2005

*The USAID-supported working group of U.S. and Russian experts worked for two years to discuss best practices that could define Russia's code of professional conduct.*

***In supporting court administration reform in Russia, USAID found that automation and case management were only part of the solution. Though some courts enforced strict adherence to rules and standards, the prevalence of poor behavior and attitudes undermined the courts overall reputation. With the adoption of a new code of conduct, Russia is building public confidence in the third branch of government.***

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Aleksei Melnichuk, a court administrator from the Tver Municipal Court, understands that the foundation of institutional change is individual change. Though Russia's courts have accomplished a great deal in court automation and case management, Melnichuk believes that "we cannot expect real changes until court personnel change their attitude toward work and citizens. To do this, we need some standard by which they can check their behavior." Some progressive courts have tried to create such rules, but these ad hoc efforts have not been enough to combat the Russian public's poor perception of their court system.

In 2004, USAID's Judicial Reform and Partnerships (JRP) program brought together U.S. Federal Court clerks, experts from the Russian Judicial Department, and court officers from JRP's pilot courts to create a code of professional conduct. The working group recognized they needed to help court staff understand their crucial function as the public face of the state within the courts. In a preamble to the code, they encouraged "each court employee to realize his or her responsibility before the state, society, and citizens to help strengthen judicial authority and foster a respectful attitude toward the court in the public consciousness."

In addition, court staff play an important role in preserving citizens' rights and their access to justice. As a result, the new code reminds staff that "a person applying to the court has the right to a respectful attitude, help, and attentive service, and his problems will not be considered burdensome." The code also includes penalties for rude or disrespectful behavior toward citizens.

In April 2006, the Council of Judges put the new rules into effect for the country's 80,000 court employees. The public took notice that "every court employee will be responsible for any inappropriate language," as the widely read newspaper *Rossiiskaya Gazeta* wrote in 2006. And indeed the rules have achieved the working group's goals. According to Maria Sidelnikova and Lyubov Olunina, who both chaired JRP pilot courts, this achievement is demonstrated by the simple fact that the public no longer files complaints about improper court personnel behavior.